

What Your Legislator Needs from You

- Timely and correct information on pending or proposed legislation, together with your best estimate of the legislation's local and/or national impact.
- “Thank you” letters;
- Exposure to constituents, such as:
 - photo opportunities when they're home visiting
 - speaking engagements before constituents on health issues
 - receptions at which to meet community pharmacists and pharmacists' supporters from the community
 - favorable publicity in the local media on stands they have taken
 - appearances on local radio/TV talk shows, and
 - fundraising and other volunteer help in campaigning for office.

Getting public visibility for your legislators is not as difficult as it may seem, as long as you understand and respect the conditions and time frames that govern the busy schedules of media representatives. For example, when publicizing a special event, such as the appearance of a member of Congress at a meeting of local pharmacists, make sure you are aware of the daily and weekly press publication schedules and the electronic media's programming schedules. Also, try to schedule such events so as not to conflict with other matters deemed by the media as “more important.” If, for example, your local TV station is invited to attend your group's presentation of its “pharmacist of the year” award on the same evening that the city's first female mayor is sworn in, which event are they going to cover?

Sometimes you may have an important story that warrants “exclusivity”—for instance, your organization may have played an inside role in a controversial issue or it may have conducted a breakthrough study whose findings you wish to release through one influential source. In such cases, the media representative—who most likely publishes under his or her byline—will want a guarantee that the story is being given to him or her alone. When working on a story with a reporter, be sure they know whether it is an “exclusive.”

It is extremely helpful to develop a professional working relationship with key media representatives, since these people can give you insights into getting your message out to the public. And try to direct the information you want publicized to the proper media source. Radio and television news directors and assignment editors decide who will cover a given story. Newspapers and magazine editors decide whether to publish your “letter to the editor” or other newsworthy items. Both groups have deadlines. Respect them and they will be more responsive to your future requests.